

# County Councilman David Marks

## Fifth District Newsletter

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## **MESSAGE FROM COUNCILMAN MARKS:** **REACTIONS TO THE COUNTY BUDGET PROPOSAL**

On April 15<sup>th</sup>, Baltimore County Executive John Olzsewski presented his first budget proposal to the County Council. This newsletter contains information about how you can express your opinion on the budget, and what it means to you and your community.

### **The County's Budget Challenges**

The county's financial situation is no secret. The previous administration spent money that should have been saved for other purposes, such as shoring up the pension fund for county retirees—prompting numerous warnings from the County Council. The school system spent too much on laptop computers, [with no clear evidence that they were achieving better results.](#) I joined two other Councilmembers in trying to cut funding for this program, but our motion failed.

Further complicating our budget situation is the county's school construction program. Baltimore County has among the oldest schools in Central

Maryland. The county needs to rebuild three new high schools, at a cost of at least \$110 million each. This spring, the state legislature had the chance to infuse our school construction program with at least \$400 million from gambling revenue. [The State Senate failed to pass this initiative.](#) It is very tough for me to support tax increases when local school projects are stalled—[except for Lansdowne High School, which will advance with an infusion of planning money.](#)

### **Expressing Your Opinion**

The budget proposal can be found here: <https://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/executive/budgetmessage/index.html>

You can express your opinion at a public hearing on Tuesday, April 30 at 6 p.m. in the Council chambers (400 Washington Avenue in Towson). Emails can be sent to the entire County Council at [countycouncil@baltimorecountymd.gov](mailto:countycouncil@baltimorecountymd.gov).

## **COUNCILMAN MARKS INTRODUCES BILL TO REQUIRE FUNDING FROM DEVELOPERS**

During its 2019 session, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation that allows Baltimore County to implement impact fees—surcharges on new residential and commercial development. With that authority, Councilman Marks has introduced legislation to implement impact fees. Under this bill, revenue must be spent locally, not deposited into the General Fund.



## UNDERSTANDING THE COUNTY BUDGET

The proposed Baltimore County operating budget is \$3.4 billion. Here are highlights from the budget plan that will be considered by the County Council.

### Education

- The total proposed education budget is more than \$1.8 billion, about \$32.1 million over Maintenance of Effort, a required threshold for funding.
- The budget provides a two percent Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for Baltimore County Public School system educators, in addition to a three percent COLA received at the beginning of the 2019 calendar year.
- The proposal cuts \$1 million in funding for laptop computers, adjusting the ratio to one-to-five for students in kindergarten through second grade.
- The budget provides the Baltimore County portion of capital funding for all remaining Schools for our Future projects. Because the state did not supply requested funding, the new Rossville Boulevard elementary school and Nottingham Middle School are delayed by at least one year.
- The budget provides planning and design funds for a new Lansdowne High School—but **not** Dulaney or Towson High Schools.
- In-county tuition is frozen at the Community College of Baltimore County.

### Health and Public Safety

- The budget creates an Opioid Strategy Coordinator to work across agencies to address the opioid crisis.
- Funding is provided for two new school-based Police Athletic League Centers through the Department of Recreation and Parks.
- In response to the settlement of a lawsuit from the Fraternal Order of Police, the proposal provides \$13 million over two years in back-pay for officers and provides step increases

and grade changes for officers.

- The plan adds \$500,000 to the volunteer fire company grant fund.

### Transportation, Infrastructure, and Communities

- The County Executive plans to create the position of Chief Diversity Officer and a Chief Sustainability Officer. Funding is provided to hire a deputy in the Department of Public Works who will oversee comprehensive transportation planning.
- About \$37 million is allocated for road resurfacing and curb and gutter maintenance, and \$2 million for traffic calming. The budget includes \$1 million for bicycle and pedestrian improvements and funding to develop a Towson Circulator pilot program.

### Tax Increases

- The budget proposal increases the local income tax rate from 2.83 percent to 3.2 percent. The property tax rate would remain unchanged.
- The County Executive is proposing a Development Impact Surcharge on new residential and commercial development.
- The hotel tax would climb from eight percent to 10 percent, and a tax would be levied on short-term rentals, such as those through Airbnb.
- A new cell phone tax would charge \$3.50 on cell phone lines. A one-percent fee would be added to cable accounts.

The County Council's Auditor begins scouring the proposal as soon as it is received. The Auditor recommends savings and identifies other issues, and the Council interviews agency heads in early May. The County Council then adopts the final budget shortly before Memorial Day.

You may view past financial reports for the county at: <https://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/budfin/index.html>.